

Trash Talk

Have you ever wondered what happens to your trash after you put it out on the curb or drop it off at the transfer station? As you may or may not know, we are a transfer station and do not have our own municipal landfill. As such, this requires us to utilize landfills in the surrounding areas. That means loading, hauling, and managing trash according to rules and regulations as set forth by others. And that comes with a cost.

As many of you are aware, the Clearwater County Solid Waste has run in the red for several years in a row. We (Clearwater County Commissioners) are looking for solutions on how best to fix this problem. We have spent the past few months analyzing and doing research to find where we can save money and cut costs.

One area that was costing the County was the recycling center. It was costing over \$100,000 a year to operate with wages, supplies, and cost of having recyclables hauled off. The County could not continue operating the Recycle Center. We do still recycle tin cans and aluminum cans. We are working on a contract to recycle cardboard and paper. It has been a slow process, but the County is not giving up on it. The biggest difference is everything will be done at the Transfer Station. The County will not be driving around and collecting cardboard.

Another big cost is that the volume of trash has been on the increase. Below is a comparison between 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. It is broken down by type of trash and where it is hauled to. (Different trash goes to different landfills.)

Approximate amount and cost of MSW (Municipal Solid Waste or household trash) the Solid Waste department hauled to the Asotin landfill:

2018/2019

5000 tons x 2000 pounds = 10,000,000 pounds per year

250 trips x \$435.00 cost per trip = \$108,750 Hauling cost per year

5000 tons x \$49.73 per ton = \$248,650 Tipping fees* per year

*cost to dump into the landfill

2019/2020

5327 tons x 2000 pounds = 10,654,000 pounds per year

266 trips x \$435.00 per trip = \$115,710 Hauling cost per year

5327 tons x 49.73 per ton = \$264,911.71 Tipping fees per year

Approximate amount of NMSW (Non-Municipal Solid Waste or brush, wood, etc.) that was hauled to Timberline and dumped in the cell:

2018/2019

1048 tons x 2000 pounds = 2,096,000 pounds per year

210 trips x \$163.83 = \$34,404.30 Hauling cost per year

2019/2020

1320 tons x 2000 pounds = 2,640,000 pounds per year

264 trips x \$163.83 = \$43,251.12 Hauling cost per year

Approximate amount of MSW (Municipal Solid Waste or household trash) hauled from Timberline to Orofino:

2018/2019

592 tons x 2000 pounds = 1,184,000 pounds per year

119 trips x \$163.83 per trip = \$19,495.77 Hauling cost per year

2019/2020

1306 tons x 2000 pounds = 2,612,000 pounds per year

261 trips x \$163.83 per trip = \$42,759.63 Hauling cost per year

Approximate cost to haul and dispose of all trash for 2018/2019 was \$411,300.07.

Approximate cost to haul and dispose of all trash for 2019/2020 was \$466,632.46.

This amounts to more than half the yearly budget. In addition to these costs for hauling and tipping fees, there is the cost of operating the Orofino Transfer Station and the Timberline Transfer Station.

As with any business we have rules and regulations we must abide by. Such as our operating plans which are a little different depending on site, Public Health Department, Department of Environmental Quality, and insurance carriers. And, with rules comes costs and maintenance to stay in compliance.

Another big cost is equipment, including maintenance and/or break downs. We do not have many options for back-up. For example, the truck that hauls the roll off containers has over 900,000 miles on it. Currently we do not have another truck that can haul the containers so when ours is out needing maintenance or repair, we scramble to hire a company to haul for us. Due to rules and regulations, we cannot just let trash sit and pile up, we are required to transfer it to the appropriate location within a certain time frame. When the truck broke down in 2019/2020 there was a cost of over \$20,000 to have a company haul for us, plus the cost of the repair on the truck. We are checking into solving this issue by converting the newer highway truck to a roll off truck and keep current roll off truck for a back-up or selling the highway truck and purchasing a lower mileage roll off truck. But due to budget constraints, Solid Waste does not have the money.

In 2020, we were finally able to complete the expansion on the Non-Municipal Solid Waste (NMSW) Cell at the Timberline site. As you can imagine this came at a price. There was finding an engineer, rental of equipment, fuel, wages, and materials. All of this adds up. For example, the engineer cost was \$7500.00, over 200 hours in labor, to name a couple. There is still the daily cost of keeping the cell maintained and up to code. One way we accomplish this is with a compactor we call "Big Blue." It is used to break up and compact the debris in the NMSW cell at the Timberline site. Big Blue is an older piece of equipment and is starting to have some leaks that are going to cost to get fixed. To take it to a shop that can work on it we need a specialized truck and trailer and permits to haul. We are working on details for how, when, and where. Again, with budget constraints, Solid Waste does not have the money.

Here are additional examples of costs:

1. Currently we do not charge to take appliances, but did you know if they have Freon in them, we are required to recover it? That costs the County money. We must pay someone's wages (it takes anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour per appliance), specialized equipment, maintenance on the equipment, a tank to evacuate gases into, and finally to properly dispose of the tank when it is full.

2. It costs the County \$95.00 per ton to dispose of tires, plus a handling fee of \$25.00, wages, time, fuel, wear and tear on truck and equipment. There is an average of 50 tires in one ton and at our current fee of \$2.00 that is only covering part of the cost.

Clearwater County Solid Waste has not raised fees since 2016 and has not raised per ton fees since 2009. Yet the cost of running the department has gone up each year.

These are just a few of the issues the Solid Waste department is facing. We have been searching for possible grants monies. We have also reached out to a recycling company to possibly open and run their own operation. We have researched surrounding counties and their fees, and we have proposed a fee increase. At this time, the Clearwater County Commissioners would like to have some community input. We are looking for possible solutions on how to be more solvent as a department.

Please feel free to contact the Commissioner's office at 208-476-3615 or the Solid Waste Department at 208-476-7903 with any thoughts, ideas, or possible solutions you may have. We are confident that by coming together as a community, we can find solutions – big and small – to better serve the residents of Clearwater County.